

Ervin Hits Computer 'Snooping'

By Roy McGhee
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One of the Senate's leading constitutionalists has served notice he will seek to curb the government's use of computer data banks for big brother snooping on American citizens.

Sen. Sam J. Ervin (D-N.J.), chairman of the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee, said a particular target will be guidelines circulated by the Secret Service.

"These guidelines are a direct threat to first amendment freedoms," said Ervin, writing in a report for his subcommittee.

Ervin was so upset when he heard about the guidelines that he went over the head of the Secret Service itself to David M. Kennedy, Secretary of the Treasury, in a letter written late last year.

"I have been seriously concerned about the guidelines issued by the Secret Service to encourage federal employees' reporting on private citizens for a vast number of reasons . . .

"I have no quarrel with the goal of the Secret Service to perform their duties efficiently. It is clear, however, to anyone educated in our constitutional form of government, that the criteria for filing information about individuals are questionable from a due process standpoint, are impractical and are conducive to a mass surveillance unprecedented in American History," Ervin complained.

The senator said he objected the guidelines on information about individuals who make threatening, irrational or abusive statements about high government officials; professional gate crashers; persons who insist on personally contacting high government officials for the purpose of redress of grievances, or people who take part in demonstrations.

Ervin also was concerned about who would have access to such information, to what purpose it would be put and whether an individual would have a chance to rebut any derogatory information in his file.

Kennedy replied that the Secret Service limited such activities to its mission of protecting the President and others for whom it provides protection. He said it sought such information only from law enforcement agencies—not the "run of the mill" government workers.

"... the Secret Service does not recall ever having requested information about people taking part in demonstrations. It has, in its guidelines, requested information regarding civil disturbances and information concerning anti-American and antigovernment demonstration," but only regarding the safety of the President when traveling. Kennedy wrote in reply.